

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S

mystery magazine

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Perhaps there is hope for those who would find needles in haystacks.

Listen, Pigs,

LISTEN



by Jack Ritchie

THE VOICE was that of a girl-woman.

"Listen, pigs, listen," she said. "There's going to be an explosion in the Wilson Math Center in exactly twenty-two minutes."

I signaled Sergeant Morrison and he quickly raced down the corridor to the switchboard.

I spoke into my phone. "I'm sorry, sir, but there seems to be a buzzing in our connection. I can hardly hear you, sir. Could you please speak louder?"

Her voice came through louder and slower. "This is for real, pigs. A

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bomb is going off in the Wilson Math Center in twenty-two minutes."

It was my job to keep her on the line as long as possible. "Oh, come now," I said. "Can't you sorority girls think of something more original? I suppose you were having a little party and someone dared you to make this call?"

The voice was insistent. "I am *not* a sorority girl. Can't you morons get this through your thick heads? This is going to be a big one. The biggest ever. And you've got less than twenty-two minutes to clear the building."

She hung up.

I glanced up at the wall clock: slightly more than eight minutes after six in the evening. That meant the bomb, if there were one, would go off at six-thirty.

I am with the campus police. Our city within a city contains more than fourteen thousand people—students, the men and women who teach them, and their families.

During the last two months, the department had received seven bomb threats. Five of them had been hoaxes; two had not.

The first explosion had done little more than break a few windows in the administration building.

The second had caused over one hundred thousand dollars in damage to the ROTC drill hall.

LISTEN, PIGS, LISTEN

Since then we have taped our incoming telephone calls and alerted our switchboard operators to trace calls within a matter of half a minute.

Morrison returned. "The call came from a pay phone in Hazel Robertson Hall."

I went to my window. Half a block down and across the street, I could see Hazel Robertson Hall. It was an eight-story dormitory which housed more than seven hundred girls.

Straight ahead nearly two blocks to where the street made a sudden bend, I could see the Wilson Mathematics Center, a five-story structure.

It was Sunday and suppertime and that part was good. Instead of hundreds of students and teachers in the math building, there might be only half a dozen or less using the time for private study or research.

Morrison consulted his watch. "Slightly more than twenty minutes left. That isn't enough time to search a five-story building. All we can do is evacuate the place and hurry with that."

I agreed, but we had only one squad car on duty Sundays. At this time of the day, that would be Burton and Reeves.

I sent Morrison to the radio dispatcher and reached for my hat.

My phone rang. I stared at it. *Damn*, I thought, but I picked up the receiver. "Campus Police Headquarters."

The man on the line cleared his throat. "My name is Preston. James L. Preston."

I was about to get somebody else to handle the call when Preston said, "I'm the maintenance supervisor at the Wilson Math Center and I just found this bomb."

I blinked. "What was that?"

Preston repeated himself and added more. "It's in a utility closet on the second floor. Takes up almost the whole space. Bags of stuff. Probably a compound with plenty of nitrogen in it."

"Don't touch a thing," I said. "Not a thing. We'll be right over."

"I disarmed it," Preston said.

"You *what*?"

"I disarmed it. The detonation device is simple. I just disconnected one of the terminals and that was that."

I took a slow breath. "Are you damn sure you knew what you were doing?"

"Absolutely. I was a demolitions sergeant in Korea. When I say a bomb's disarmed, it's disarmed."

"How did you happen to find it?"

"Well, I was just finishing supper when I remembered that I was expecting this extra shipment of cleaning supplies tomorrow morn-

ing and so I started thinking about a place to store them. I remembered this utility closet we hardly ever use because it's off on a small blind corridor. So I came over to check if it was still empty and it wasn't."

"Where are you calling from?"

"The phone in Professor Erickson's office. The utility closet is just around the corner."

"Good. Now go back there and guard the bomb. Don't let anyone monkey with it. We're sending officers over there right away."

I hung up just as Morrison returned from the radio dispatcher. I told him about the call from Preston.

He was relieved. "For once a real break. Now how about sealing off the entrances and exits of Hazel Robertson Hall?"

"With what?"

He thought about that and nodded. On Sundays we operate with minimal personnel. If I wanted enough men to seal off the hall, it would take time and a lot of phone calls and it would be too late.

"Besides," I said, "just because she made the call from Hazel Robertson doesn't mean that she's living there. She could have come from anywhere on the campus. The city, for that matter. We can't assume that she's a co-ed. Whoever she is, I'll give you fifty to one that she made the call and then got the hell

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LISTEN

out of there. There's no point in stirring up the whole dormitory on the slim chance that she might still be there."

I did have to tell the city police about the bomb. I dialed police headquarters and got through to a Lieutenant McLean, who was duty officer for the day.

"This is Detective-Sergeant Farrell of the Campus Police," I said. "We've got another bomb threat. The Wilson Math Center. According to the caller, the bomb was set to go off at six-thirty."

McLean must have checked with his watch. "It's six-fourteen now. That gives us only sixteen minutes and that's not enough to search a big building, much less get the squad together. You'll have to evacuate the place immediately."

"There's more," I said. "The maintenance supervisor over there accidentally discovered the bomb and he says he's disarmed it."

There were a few seconds of silence. "Is he *positive* about that?"

"He claims he was a demolitions sergeant in Korea. But I sent two of my men over. One of them, Burton, took the city course on explosives last year and he still ought to remember something about the subject. He'll let me know what's what as soon as he gets there and takes a look at it."

"All right," McLean said. "I'll

get busy rounding up the bomb squad. Might take a little time though, this being Sunday. Will you need any other help? Besides the squad, I mean?"

One of the maxims of the campus cop is never to ask for city help unless you absolutely need it. "No," I said. "I think our department can handle everything else."

I put down the phone. It rang again immediately.

This time it was Burton over at the Wilson Mathematics Center. "I just had a look at the bomb. Enough power there to blow up half the building."

"But will it?"

"No. It's disarmed. Tame as a rabbit. Preston knew what he was doing."

"Evacuate the building anyway. Just to play it safe."

"If I can find anybody. All we've heard is our footsteps."

I put down the phone and reached for my hat.

The phone rang again just as Morrison and I were about to step out of the door. I sighed and went back.

It was the girl again. "Why aren't you doing something, pig? Why isn't the building being evacuated? You've got only fourteen minutes left."

My eyes went to the window. Yes, from the outside, it did look as

though nothing was being done in the Wilson Mathematics Center. Burton and Reeves must have parked their squad car in the parking lot at the rear of the building.

I thought I'd get a few more of her words for the voice prints. "Now look here, Louise, that's enough of this. In case you don't realize it, I have work to do. I can't play your little game anymore."

"I am not your Louise," she snapped. "And I'm serious about the bomb."

"Come now, Louise. Do you think I can't recognize my own niece's voice?"

Anger made her voice tremble. "Damn it, I'm not joking. This is a real bomb and it's going off in less than fourteen minutes."

She hung up.

Morrison had taken the extension phone. He looked at me. "Your niece? I didn't know you had a niece."

"I don't." I went to the window and stared at Hazel Robertson Hall. Was she still there after all, watching the front of the Wilson Mathematics Center and waiting for the explosion? Or had she moved on to one of the other dormitories that lined the street?

"Ready to go?" Morrison asked.

"No," I said. "We'll wait here."

"What for?"

"I don't know. But we'll wait."

Morrison joined me at the window. "This is the first time the call was made by a woman."

"I know. I've been giving that some thought." I glanced at my watch: six-eighteen.

"She couldn't have made this bomb all by herself?"

"No," I said. "There are probably three or four others mixed up in this."

"I don't see anybody leaving the Math Center," Morrison said.

I nodded. "If anybody was in there, Burton and Reeves probably shooed them out the back way."

"What kind of people do these things?" Morrison wondered. "What kind of students? What kind of nuts?"

"These are probably quiet ones who come from good warm homes and wouldn't dream of running a red traffic light," I said. "But they've convinced themselves that they have the right to do things like this for their cause, whatever it is today."

"They give us warnings," Morrison said. "At least you can say that for them. They don't want to kill anybody."

"They've been lucky so far. But when you fool around with high explosives, somebody's going to get killed eventually. And when that happens, they don't really have the right to be surprised or horrified."

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My phone rang. I answered it. It was the girl again. "Can't you stupid pigs understand? That bomb is going off in ten minutes. You've got to clear the building right away!"

I stared at the silent math building again. "I know what you're trying to do, Louise."

"Damn it," she almost screamed. "I am *not* Louise!"

"I know what you're trying to do," I said again. "You're trying to embarrass Professor Erickson's seminar."

"What are you talking about?"

"Your father told me all about it," I said. "How disappointed and bitter you were because your grades kept you from qualifying for the professor's seminar. But breaking up a meeting of a hundred graduate students is both vindictive and childish, Louise."

There seemed to be a stunned silence. "You mean that there are a hundred people in that building? Right now?"

"Of course, Louise. Professor Erickson's seminars are quite popular. Now good-bye, Louise. If you

bother me once again I'll have to get in touch with your father."

"Wait," she screamed. "I'll tell you where the bomb is and how to disarm it!"

I hung up.

My phone rang again in less than ten seconds.

I let it ring.

Morrison watched me. "Aren't you going to answer it?"

"No."

I went to the window.

The phone rang for nearly two minutes and then it stopped.

Morrison joined me at the window.

I don't know what I really expected or whether I expected anything at all.

Thirty seconds went by.

Then the girl burst from one of the other dormitories down the street.

She ran desperately, wildly, toward the Wilson Mathematics Center in the frantic hope of getting to the bomb before she thought it would explode.

I sighed. "All right, Morrison, let's go down and make the arrest."

